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ABSTRACT

A review of the status of English language instruction in the Sultanate of Oman discusses the role of English in the society in general and in each segment of the educational system. The report provides information on the following topics: the characteristics and training of English teachers; the type and availability of instructional and related materials; educational administration in relation to English teaching; the development and planning of English instruction; English instruction outside the educational system; British, American, and other foreign support for the teaching of English; related commercial opportunities; creative writing; and current research in English linguistics. It is noted that recent administrative developments have not resulted in the anticipated changes in English instruction, but that the teaching of English is still regarded as having great general, technical, and commercial significance. Some greater awareness of standards in instruction is also emerging, although there is room for considerable improvement. (MSE)

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ENGLISH TEACHING PROFILE

Country: Sultanate of Oman

Date: October 1985

1. ROLE AND STATUS OF ENGLISH

English is the most important foreign language in Oman, partly because of the residual political influence of Britain, but mainly because of its position as an international language. With such a large expatriate presence, European and Asian, it is the lingua franca of commerce. At director level and above in government and ministerial circles, one can usually carry on a two-way correspondence in English and have little trouble in conversation. An added impetus to English is the presence of many Omanis of East African origin whose mother tongue is Swahili, closely followed by English, while their Arabic is often non-existent.

It is accepted that for work most Omani employees, except those in the lowest grades, need some competence in English. For this reason both public and private sector concerns either provide in-house language training or send their employees to an institution to be trained.

Within the primary and secondary education system, English is not a medium of instruction - the only exception being the fee-paying co-educational Sultan's school, where science, maths and English are taught in English throughout the twelve years of schooling. Another private school is planning to use British teachers for some subjects at secondary level.

At tertiary level, the medium of instruction will be English in all the faculties of Sultan Qaboos University (opening in September 1986) except the College of Education where, apart from the English Department, Arabic will be the medium of instruction. At the Oman Technical and Industrial College (OTIC) the technical courses (Construction Laboratory Sciences, Electrical, Mechanical/Automotive), are taught in English while Business Studies is taught in Arabic.

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Reading for pleasure, even in Arabic, is not common among Omanis. Only one or two Omani authors write in English.

2. ENGLISH WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

No literature is taught as such even at secondary level - except in the prestigious Sultan's School where a number of extracts and short stories are studied, as well as a complete novel. From the second year of English upwards, however, pupils study one or two simplified readers in addition to their main textbook. Schools also have class library sets of simplified readers for each of the three secondary years, and there are plans to extend this class library idea down to preparatory (lower secondary) level.

The study of literature appears, as may be expected, on the proposed curriculum of the English specialists in the College of Education of Sultan Qaboos University.

Only in the increasing number of private schools is English taught in kindergarten and the first three years of the primary level. The choice of textbooks and recruitment of teachers is the responsibility of each private school but the English Language Teaching (ELT) Unit of the Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs is empowered to inspect and advise (and reject where necessary) these schools.

In government schools, English is taught for five 35-minute periods a week from Year 4 (age 9-10) to Year 6 (11-12) of the elementary cycle and five 40-minute periods a week in the three years of the preparatory cycle (age 12-15). In the secondary cycle (age 15-18) English is taught for six 40-minute periods a week in first Secondary. In second and third Secondary, students are divided, one might say streamed, into the science option students and the arts option students. Science students have six 40-minute periods a week and the arts students eight periods a week.

No British-based examinations are taken within the education system (with the exception, for in-service teacher education, of the Royal Society of Arts Diploma for Overseas Teachers of English).

The sixth elementary examination must be passed by students in all subjects, including English, before they continue to preparatory level. It is not as important as it was even a few years ago as shown by the increasing numbers of pupils at preparatory and secondary levels. It is no longer centrally controlled by the Examinations Department of the Ministry of Education, each of the nine administrative regions writing, administering and marking, examination papers.

The third preparatory examination (Adadia amma) is centrally written and marked and must be passed in all subjects, including English, before pupils continue to secondary level. There are, however, extra cut-off points in that only candidates with sixty per cent are allowed to go on to general secondary schools or the Capital Area Islamic Institute. Students with lower marks can choose to go first to one of the two commercial schools (Boys' or Girls') in the Capital Area, to the Sohar Technical School, or to the Nizwa Agricultural College. Students with very low marks can go to one of the nine vocational training institutes which come under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour.

The third secondary examination (Thanawia amma) is, similarly, centrally written and marked. Again, the student must pass in all subjects including English.

In addition to the end-of-cycle examinations there are also 'promotional examinations' which determine whether or not a student continues to the next year of study. Inspectors, individual teachers or groups of teachers write the fourth and fifth elementary English examinations, while the ELT Unit in the Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs writes the examinations for the other levels - which are then marked by groups of teachers.

All students have a second chance in all examinations, since there is a 're-sit' session just before each school year for students who fail the first session.

Nizwa Agricultural College is a secondary parallel institution, coming under the special schools section of the Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs. As far as English is concerned, it is run on the same lines and uses the same materials as general secondary schools - the only addition being the teaching of some specialized lexis. The standard is somewhat lower, however, than the general secondary schools. Also under the special schools section are the two commercial secondary schools (one for Boys' and one for Girls') in the Capital Area, which have general and commercial English courses whose syllabus and materials are presently under review. There is also the secondary parallel Sohar Technical School.

The North East Wales Institute (NEWI) signed, in May 1985, a two-year agreement to develop the curriculum in automotive and electrical engineering, electronics, mechanical engineering, refrigeration and air conditioning. There is likely to be an element of English for specific purposes (ESP) in the English curriculum (currently six hours a week).

The responsibility for designing syllabuses for government schools, and the choice and development of textbooks and ancillary materials with publishers, lies with the ELT unit of the Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs.

Each of the nine administrative regions has between one and four Inspectors or Assistant Inspectors (at present upgraded teachers), responsible for all aspects of English teaching in their region - from postings of teachers to inspecting and advising teachers in their classes and running in-service teacher training courses. Inspectors are responsible to the Director of the Region for matters of administration, and to the Head of the ELT Unit for professional matters. There are at present three Sri Lankan inspectors, four Sudanese, one Indian, two British (one of whom is an appointee of the British Council's Key English Language Teaching scheme, KELT), one Egyptian and three Omanis. All non-British expatriate inspectors have been sent to Britain from their home country for further study, two for recent MAs at Cardiff and Leeds. Two of the Omanis have been sent to Britain and one to America.

The Centre for British Teachers signed a contract in June 1985 to provide up to seven British regional inspectors from September 1985. (See also Section 3.)

In-service teacher training for English language teachers is the responsibility of the ELT Unit and has two main emphases - to raise the calibre of Omani teachers of English and to provide book orientation and general teacher training courses (book-specific to a large extent) for both Omani and expatriate teachers. Courses leading to the Royal Society of Arts Diploma for Overseas Teachers of English are now run on a regular basis for Omani teachers of English. All teachers new to the Sultanate, and teachers being upgraded

from one level to another, follow three- or four-day introductory modules at the appropriate level (elementary, preparatory or secondary) and then follow a series of one-day modules which focus on a particular skill and/or teaching technique. The approach adopted is, in the main, a 'whole lesson approach'; the teachers complete a preliminary worksheet on the 'theory', observe a demonstration lesson and have peer teaching practice on a selected part of the lesson. They are subsequently observed in specially written follow-up lessons by their own regional inspector. Some of the modules also contain a book orientation element designed to make teachers aware of particular problem areas and to give them practice in the necessary techniques. Some of the in-service teacher training modules also contain a video component.

Whenever a new book is introduced into the syllabus, or when books are revised in a major way, all teachers concerned attend a three- to five-day book orientation course.

Materials for all courses and modules are written by the Chief Teacher Trainer (based in the ELT Unit) who runs a demonstration seminar, either centrally or regionally. It is attended by regional inspectors of English who then run the same seminar in centres in their own regions.

Nine Vocational Training Institutes (VTI) come under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MOSAL), four of which have opened since 1981: Darsait (300), Nizwa (250), Al-Musarra (250), Seeb (150), Sohar (150), Salalah (100), Sur (80), Ibra (80), and Ibri (80). At the time of writing there are twenty-three English language teachers (eighteen Sri Lankan, two Pakistani, two Sudanese and one Egyptian) and they have been under the professional guidance of the KELT Head of General Studies in OTIC for the 1984-85 academic year. A KELT was appointed for 1981-84 and produced the course textbooks for both the technical and commercial sections. In September 1985 a new KELT was appointed to upgrade the syllabus, materials and testing system as from that date VTIs will become secondary parallel instead of preparatory parallel. There will probably be six periods of English a week for the three years. English does not enjoy departmental status and the teachers of it come under the Head of Commerce.

Oman Technical Industrial College (OTIC) opened as a tertiary level institution in November 1984. It provides technician-level training in various branches of engineering, laboratory technology and business studies. It is largely British-staffed on the techical side, and a KELT ESP specialist is currently Head of the General Studies Department. The ELT Unit teaches other groups of students (Directorate of Labour inspectors and vocational training instructors) as well as regular OTIC students for whom specific English courses are being designed. There is a preparatory term of twelve weeks, with fifteen of the thirty-five periods devoted to English for technical students, while the largely Arabic-medium business students have thirteen periods. This term is followed by four semesters of sixteen weeks each.

The secondary parallel pre-service teacher training institutes will have been phased out by summer 1986. Their three-year course has been replaced by a two-year post-secondary course in the new teacher training colleges which had their first intake in November 1984. At present there is one male and one female Teacher Training Institute/College in the Capital Area. There is also a male Institute in Salalah but this has not been well attended and no English specialists have been produced there. Male and female colleges are planned for three more regions in the next five-year plan.

Under the former system, students from the Islamic Studies section had two 40-minute periods of English a week and those from the General section had four periods. The specialist English-teaching section had eighteen 40-minute periods of English a week in the first year, fifteen in the second year and fourteen in the third year; these periods included methodology, language improvement and classroom visits but not teaching practice.

Under the new scheme in the colleges, all students, irrespective of future specialization, follow the same English course - four 50-minute periods a week - in the first semester. The English specialists then have eight periods a week in the second semester, sixteen in the third and eight in the fourth; these periods include methodology, language improvement and classroom observation. Other subject students have no periods of English after the first semester.

Materials are being written or selected for the course in the new Teacher Training Colleges by the British (KELT) expert working in the Department of Teacher Training and Inspection of the Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs; this work will be completed by June 1986.

The teachers produced by the institutes teach mainly at elementary level although one or two may also teach at preparatory level; those produced by the colleges teach at both levels.

Sultan Qaboos University, which opens in September 1986, will have a Language Centre providing Study Skills and Language Improvement work for students from all the faculties (Medicine, Engineering, Science, Agriculture and Education). All students will follow a one-year (Foundation Year) 450-hour English course. It has been proposed that homogeneous groups of students be formed - the Foundation Science Course students, the English specialists in the College of Education and the non-English specialist students in the College of Education. Such homogeneity would permit the use of subject-based material and would probably also provide additional homogeneity in language proficiency. Science students will also follow a ninety-hour Introduction to Science and English Course in the first year and a further seventy-five hours in the first semester of the second year. The College of Education will produce TEFL (Teaching English as a foreign language) teachers who will have followed a four-year, 75-credit unit course leading to a BEd (TEFL). The degree for which residence in an English-speaking country will be required is under discussion.

Adult education is regarded as very important, indeed essential, since only three schools existed in the Sultanate before 1970. There is an increasing number of adult education centres in each region, where students follow courses in the afternoon or evening which are identical to those of the normal day schools. Adult students, just as day students, have to succeed in both promotional and certificate examinations (sixth elementary, third preparatory, third secondary).

The only slight differences in ELT materials are that there is an adult version of Books 1-3 of the English for Oman course (see Section 4) - conflated into two books; and that there is an extra class reader to replace the class reading libraries at secondary level. They are staffed by morning schoolteachers who give extra (remunerated) periods to adult students in the afternoon or evening and they are inspected by their normal regional English language inspector. There is also one national adult education inspector for English, based in the Department of Adult Education in the Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs.

English language teaching films, made by the ELT Unit of the Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs prior to 1981, are screened on Oman Television in the two or three months before the national examinations (May). This, at present, is the only use made of broadcasting. There are plans, however, for the ELT Unit to produce some new English Language Teaching films in co-operation with the Audio-Visual Section of the Curriculum Department of the Ministry of Education, but this will depend largely upon personnel resources.

There are no correspondence courses designed for learning English, although the ELT Unit has used this method of distance teaching in connection with a one-year in-service teacher training course for Omani teachers of English based outside the capital.

3. TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

The English language teaching cadre in the Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs is composed of the following nationalities: British, Egyptian, Indian, Jordanian, Omani, Pakistani, Palestinian, Sri Lankan, Sudanese, Tanzanian and Tunisian.

The percentage of Omani teachers of English is gradually increasing at the rate of one or two per cent a year with the output of the two pre-service teacher training institutions. The flow of experienced Omani teachers from Zanzibar or elsewhere has now been reduced to a trickle of two or three a year. The ELT Unit is concerned with improving the standard of graduates from the Teacher Training Institute.

There are no problems in finding enough teachers from other countries, although their quality is variable. Jordan, Egypt and Sudan have government-to-government agreements with Oman whereby it is agreed that a certain number of teachers shall be provided each year - although the ELT Unit sends an Omani representative to interview the teachers put forward.

The Centre for British Teachers has been asked to provide up to twenty English language teachers and up to seven inspectors for the academic year 1985-86. If this pilot project is a success then it is probable that the scheme will expand in subsequent years.

A small number of Omanis go to Britain (or Australia) each year for further training - from language improvement courses in private language schools to MA courses in ELT and/or linguistics (see Section 13).

There is also scope for increased British activity, in teacher training, particularly on the pre-service side where the Men's Teacher Training College is in great need of British-trained personnel. The planned new Teacher Training College would also benefit from a British presence.

There is at present no professional organization for teachers of English, although regular journals are produced by the inspectors in three of the nine administrative regions. There are plans for the ELT Unit to produce a journal of rather higher quality for and by teachers from all regions; this may possibly extend eventually to institutions outside the Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs but this is not certain - and may not in fact be permissible.

4. MATERIALS SUPPORT

No major problems are associated with the supply of teaching materials for all levels either within or outside the education system - except those associated with the long distance of some areas from the capital, and with schools remote from the regional centre. In the last two years there has been a thirty per cent reduction in the number of books ordered by the Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs. This has presented no problems as far as Pupil's Books are concerned since these can be collected and re-used. Workbooks obviously cannot be used again and the problem of shortages has now been resolved.

Longman has a contract with the Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs to provide books (the English for Oman course) for the first six years of English (Years 4-9 of school). All six books and ancillary materials have been produced and developed in close co-operation with the ELT Unit which trials new books in twenty-five per cent of the schools before a first edition is published. The elementary books (Books 1, 2 and 3) are now being extensively revised, and the new edition of Book 1 will be introduced in the 1985-86 academic year, Book 2 in 1986-87 and Book 3 in 1987-88.

The elementary package will consist of:

Pupil's Book
Activities Book
Handwriting Book
Interleaved teacher's version of the Pupil's Book
Activities Book
Teacher's Manual
Wall charts
Cassettes
Picture cards
Flashcards and flashcard holder
Word wheels
Reading cards

The preparatory level package consists of:

Pupil's Book
Workbook
Teacher's Book
Cassettes

All teachers have access to a Ministry-supplied cassette recorder.

Longman also has a contract to produce materials for the secondary level and has produced English for Oman, Book 7 in a first edition, Book 8 in a trial edition, and Book 9 in outline form. Book 8 has a general core course with built-in options for science and arts students. The Ministry decided, however, to allow ELTA/OUP to trial first the Crescent Course, Book 6 and then Book 5 materials, both of which were judged by the ELT Unit to be unsuitable for Oman; and in 1984-85, Oman Secondary English, Book 1, written specially for Oman by the authors of the Crescent materials.

The Longman English for Oman, Book 7 package consists of:

Pupil's Book
Workbook
Teacher's Book

Wall charts
Cassettes
Extra materials:
(Core Plus/Core Minus which provide extending activities for brighter pupils and remedial work for weaker ones)

The ELTA/OUP Oman Secondary English, Book 1 package consists of:

Pupil's Book
Workbook
Teacher's Book
Cassettes

Until either Longman or ELTA/OUP provide materials for all three years of secondary, the teachers use a variety of textbooks, all British published, with their second and third secondary classes.

The number of books available in English or on English language teaching is increasing, as is the number of bookshops which stock English books - even outside the capital.

There is a small teacher's library in the ELT Unit and there are plans to create one in each of the regional centres. There will also be a large library in Sultan Qaboos University when it opens in 1986. The British Council is really the only institution to have a well-stocked library of literary and specialized texts in a variety of subjects as well as newspapers and journals. The United States Information Service also has a library but this is much smaller than that of the Council.

5. EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION IN RELATION TO ENGLISH TEACHING

The ELT Unit of the Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs is now a Department within the Directorate of Educational Development. There is close co-operation between the Unit and the Department of Teacher Training and Inspection, in that the Unit provides teachers for the teacher training colleges and institutes and is responsible for all English in-service teacher training. The writing of English language teaching and training materials for the teacher training colleges, while carried out by a British Council (KELT) adviser in the Department of Teacher Training and Inspection, is under the control of the Head of the ELT Unit.

6. DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING OF THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

On the accession of H.M. Sultan Qaboos in 1970 there were only three schools with 900 students in Oman. The last fifteen years have seen an expansion and development of the education system that no other country has experienced in such a short time.

By 1976 the number of schools had increased to 261 - 213 elementary, 45 preparatory, and 3 secondary - and pupil numbers had increased to 65,000. By 1981 school rolls had doubled and the number of schools had risen to 400 with 6,500 teachers and administrators. In 1984 there were 500 schools - 300 elementary, 171 preparatory and 29 secondary - providing education for 165,000 pupils.

Diversification of education started in 1976 with the opening of a class for the preparation of teachers - this developed first into secondary parallel teacher training institutes and ten post-secondary teacher training colleges - one for men and one for women. The Nizwa Agricultural College opened in 1979 and the present number of pupils is about 100. The Boys' Commercial School opened in 1979 and a Girls' Commercial School in 1983. A school for the handicapped opened in 1980. The third Five Year Plan, due to start in 1986, is to concentrate on the regions and will include new school buildings and the creation of teacher training colleges in the regions as well as an in-service Teacher Training Centre in the capital.

The Curriculum Department of the Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs is responsible for ensuring that curricula are in line with the principles of Islam, and that teaching materials contain nothing that would be offensive to Islamic or Omani culture. The ELT Unit works in co-operation with this Department as new materials are developed but the Unit is fairly autonomous and decisions are often taken unilaterally.

The Curriculum Department and the ELT Unit work through the Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Sciences with the Arab Centre for Educational Research of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) to try and standardize the curriculum throughout GCC countries. An important development is that students from the United Arab Emirates and Oman can now study freely in either country.

7. ENGLISH OUTSIDE THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

A large proportion of both the public and the private sector either provide in-house English language training for their employees or use an outside agency for this purpose. The teaching of English literature does not form part of any of the curricula except in the form of simplified, graded readers.

A number of Omanis send their children to private schools, which are increasing in size and number. English is taught from kindergarten upwards. The prestigious Sultan's School is the only one which offers a truly English medium education in some subjects, although the expanded Al-Najah school is planning to hire British teachers who will teach their subjects in English. The following is a list of the private schools that exist at present:

Al Najah:	four Indian teachers of English in the kindergarten and primary levels; a preparatory/ secondary section is due to open with a number of British teachers
Qurm School:	five teachers of English, including one British teacher - kindergarten and primary
Dar Al-Hanan School:	kindergarten and primary
Oman Ideal School:	three teachers of English - kindergarten and primary
National School:	two teachers of English - kindergarten and primary
Sultan's School:	three teachers of English - kindergarten to secondary

Both the Indian Central School and the Pakistan College have specialist English teachers.

There are three private English language schools (excluding the British Council Language Centres in Muscat and Salalah):

Polyglot, which hires British personnel locally - often expatriate wives. It has a number of outside contracts - with Petroleum Development Oman, for example.

The Al-Amri Institute, run by a British former Ministry of Education teacher. This is very small and concentrates mainly on 'cramming' students to pass third preparatory and third secondary examinations, although it does have some outside contracts.

The Al-Noor School of English - very small and with no British teachers.

In September 1985 two more schools opened. They have links with the International Language Centre and International House respectively.

The Ministry of Defence has a large English teaching programme. A considerable number of British teachers work in a number of different institutions.

The Sultan of Oman's Air Force School in Ghala (Capital Area), has about twenty-five teachers of general English for about 1,450 students from all three services, at preparatory and secondary level. There is a similar, smaller school in the southern region in Salalah.

The Sultan's Armed Forces School at Ghala (different to the school just mentioned) teaches general English at preparatory and secondary level.

The Ministry of Defence Engineering Division at MAM Camp (Capital Area), has three Britons and two Australians who teach general English and English for power generation to young adults who have not had a secondary education.

The Royal Guard Technical School is an English medium school with three English teachers. They teach general English, English for science and technology and commercial English to students aged 11-19 who follow English medium courses in technical and commercial subjects.

The Royal Guard School has three teachers teaching general English to adults - officers who are going to Britain on courses, for example.

The Sultan of Oman's Navy training camp in Sur has one English language teacher of general English to preparatory and secondary level students.

The Royal Oman Police has general English language training both at the Police Academy in Nizwa and in the Capital Area. There is also a British teacher giving general English lessons at the Royal Oman Police Coastguard Division.

Other organizations providing English language training include:

Oman Aviation
Internal Security Department
Oman Institute of Bankers
Oman Television and Radio
Oman Oil Refinery
General Telecommunications Organisation
Petroleum Development Oman
Institute of Health Sciences - see Section 8

8. BRITISH SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

British Council employs or sponsors staff who work in three Ministries - Education and Youth Affairs, Social Affairs and Labour, and Health.

Four KELT officers work in the Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs:

Chief Teacher Trainer	- developing in-service training materials, upgrading of Omani teachers, staff development for regional inspectors, running teacher training courses.
Curriculum Development/ Examinations Officer	- developing examination formats, writing and producing examinations, liaison with authors and publishers on the production and revision of teaching materials.

(Both the above posts are responsible to the Omani Head of the ELT Unit.)

Pre-Service Teacher Training Curriculum Expert	- producing course materials for the Teacher Training Colleges.
Inspector/Teacher Trainer, Southern Region, Salalah	- inspecting and advising teachers, running teacher training courses, general administration connected with the role of a regional inspector.

A fifth KELT post in the ELT Unit assists the Chief Teacher Trainer in running and writing in-service teacher training courses.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour has a KELT Head of General Studies (English, mathematics and computer studies) and British Council-recruited English language teachers at the tertiary level in Oman Industrial and Technical College as well as British Council-recruited (ODA-sponsored) technical and scientific staff and Director of Studies.

Both general and special purpose English courses are given, using both British-published and locally developed materials which are specifically designed to bridge the gap between the students' low English proficiency level and the lectures and demonstrations given by non-ELT trained science and technical staff.

There are plans for a further KELT post in the Ministry itself. The duties of the postholder would be to oversee English teaching in the vocational training institutes.

The Institute of Health Sciences (IHS) in the Ministry of Health has one KELT Head of English, four British Council-recruited teachers of English and one locally recruited teacher (Indian). The Head of the Institute is also an ODA-sponsored post. IHS opened in October 1982 with initial intakes of nurses and laboratory technicians. ESP materials have been designed for registered nurses covering an eighteen-week pre-nursing course and a six-week nursing introductory course, as have courses of similar length for assistant nurses. More occupationally focussed materials for training periods of two to three weeks that will punctuate the clinical training programme are in hand. Materials for laboratory technicians have been designed and plans are being made for the Physiotherapy and Radiography Departments due to open in late

1985. In the longer term, it is likely that IHS will manage a Continuing Education system for the Omani Health Service which will broaden the range of ESP services required.

The British Council has Director Teaching of English Operations (DTEOs) in Muscat and Salalah. The DTEO in Muscat operates from a purpose-built English Language Centre within the British Council building in Medinat Qaboos. It has six classrooms and a staff of thirty and operates all year round with four ten-week afternoon/evening terms and eight five-week morning terms. It offers General English courses at ten levels from beginners to pre-FCE (First Certificate in English), each course involving 100 class hours. There are also special courses - an ABC course for beginners and FCE and O-level courses, and courses in O-level physics and mathematics. Students are predominantly male Omanis, with eighty per cent sponsored by government Ministries, Armed Forces and public bodies. The DTEO in Salalah has a similar student profile, but is a smaller operation with a staff of five. All levels of English are taught, from non-alphabet beginners to FCE.

9. AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

The United States Information Service (USIS) is no longer involved directly in ELT in Oman, either in government schools or in a language teaching operation, and apparently has no plans to do so in a major way in the near future. It offers occasional study tours for key Omani personnel working in ELT. The KELT Chief Teacher Trainer at the ELT Unit has taken Omani teachers to USIS in the past and there is the possibility of his using a visiting lecturer who would visit Oman during a general Gulf/North African tour and work with participants on the course for the Royal Society of Arts' Diploma for Overseas Teachers of English, run by the ELT Unit.

10. OTHER AGENCY SUPPORT

Australia is the only other country involved in English language teaching in Oman and that only in a very small way. Seven of the 1983 graduates of the Men's Teacher Training Institute were sent, at Omani expense, to the University of Perth to follow courses leading to a BEd with a TEFL component. Three transferred to courses in Britain after the first year and therefore only four are currently studying in Australia.

11. COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

The number of institutions offering English language tuition is great enough to provide a reasonable, if fragmented, market for ELT materials - although it would be difficult to enter the Ministry of Education market except with class readers and class reading libraries. There is a market for certain types of hardware - high quality and robust cassette tape recorders, for example, for school use. A small and very slowly growing market exists for Computer Assisted Language Learning soft- and hard-ware.

Private language tuition is common. The imminent arrival of the International Language Centre and the heavily subscribed courses at the British Council Language Centre bear witness to this demand.

Recruitment of British language teachers for the education system will be done for the first time this year (1985-86) by the Centre for British Teachers, and is likely to expand in the future. The market outside the education system is very small. Sultan Qaboos University is undertaking its own recruitment.

There is no market at present for teacher training since this is fully covered by the staff of the ELT Unit and the publishers concerned.

12. CREATIVE WRITING

There is no local literary movement and very little local writing - which is usually of an historical or informative nature.

13. CURRENT RESEARCH

The main current research effort concerned with English teaching in Oman is on teacher competence conducted by the Research Department of the Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs. This is a follow-up to the study conducted by the same Department on 'Standards of English language among sixth elementary and third preparatory students in some government schools and some recommendations as to how these standards could be improved'. Other studies on language proficiency have been conducted. Mini-research topics are also being conducted by Omani students following MA courses in Britain during the academic year 1984-85.

Five full scholarships were offered by the British Government; three of the students concerned are now completing MAs in ELT and one is completing a Moray House Diploma. The fifth student unfortunately returned to Oman shortly after arriving in Britain.

The Council also arranged for twelve teacher training institute graduates to go to Britain for language improvement courses to be followed, at Bell's School, Saffron Walden and the Edinburgh Language Foundation, and the next year to go on to ELT courses probably at Moray House or the University of Leeds.

A British Council consultant has been out twice in the past year to Sultan Qaboos University Project, to draw up the curriculum specifications for the Foundation Year English Language Courses in the Language Centre and the courses to be taken by the English specialists of the College of Education.

14. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

None.

15. GENERAL STATEMENT

When, in the autumn of 1983, the ELT Unit became a Department responsible to the Director-General of Educational Development rather than directly answerable to the Under-Secretary as formerly, there was a feeling that this might reflect a changing attitude towards the place of English in the curriculum. This has not proved to be the case and the re-organization should now be viewed more as regularizing the situation. The teaching of English is still regarded as of great importance both in general and technical or commercial education. A small illustration of this is that H.E. the Minister of Education and Youth Affairs has spent much of his visiting time in English classes this year. The 1986 opening of Sultan Qaboos University is also beginning to increase awareness and concern with the standards of English language teaching and learning in the schools - although it is paradoxically recognized that only students of appropriate calibre will be able to attend the University.

It is true that the standard attained after six or nine years of English is, perhaps, not as high as it should be. The reasons for this are difficult to pinpoint with any accuracy, but there are a number of contributing factors.

The Sultanate of Oman is in many ways still a developing country and it has imported or developed many problems that are common to the education systems of all developing countries. Luckily, because there is still a certain amount of money available for education, a lot more is achievable than in poorer developing countries. This, coupled with the fact that the importance and value of English is recognized by all, makes one view the future of English language teaching in Oman with optimism.